

**TFTD 23.36 Tuesday April 4th**

**AN OPPORTUNE TIME: Matthew 26.31-56**



**Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, ‘Sit here while I go over there and pray.’ He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to them, ‘I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.’ And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.’ Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and**

he said to Peter, 'So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.' Again he went away for the second time and prayed, 'My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.' Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.'

I am always fascinated by the words at the end of Luke's account of Jesus's temptation in the wilderness: When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

We tend to think of the temptations as over and done with after the episode in the wilderness. Right at the start of his ministry, the devil has tried to make Jesus deviate from his true calling. But it didn't work: Jesus has seen off the devil, and now he can get on with the rest of his life. Except that I

**don't think it was quite so simple: Jesus has won a battle, but the war is not over yet. The devil is biding his time, ready to try again at "an opportune time".**

**I think the opportune times were the moments where Jesus was faced with a major choice, a fork in the road where he had to decide which way was the will of his Father and which way was not. And the most opportune time of all was surely that time in the Garden of Gethsemane, just before Jesus was arrested.**

**We know from Matthew's account that Jesus was really upset: "deeply grieved and agitated". We know that this time in the garden was a real struggle. We know that Jesus would have loved to have avoided the way of the Cross: "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me".**

**And you can just imagine what the devil was saying, to try and make him deviate from this last and hardest way: Oh come on, Jesus, do you really have to go through with this? Do you really think your loving Father wants to send you to your death? Why cut your ministry short just when**

**you're beginning to get the recognition you deserve? And think how many more people you could heal if you kept going. And then there's your disciples: what about them? You can't leave them in the lurch, they'll just go to pieces without you.**

**After all, the devil continued, you know perfectly well you can still easily get out of it: apologise to the high priest, promise to stop rocking the boat; tone down your language a bit, don't be so provocative.**

**But Jesus holds firm. He realises that yes, he really does have to drink this cup, it really is his Father's will that he should walk the path of shame and disgrace, and go to a cruel death: "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done."**

**"Your will be done": words that we too still pray every day – as bidden by Jesus. But when I pray those words in the Lord's Prayer, asking for my Father's will to prevail, what do I think I mean? I suppose the idea at the back of my mind is that I am calling on God to establish peace and justice, to bring to fruition his eternal reign of love.**

**Nothing wrong with that – but what if I am really praying something much more personally challenging? What if “Thy will be done” applies primarily not to the life of the world as a whole, but to my own life, just as it did when Jesus prayed those words. What if it means: I would really love to extricate myself from this difficult situation, I would really love to just avoid that person who gets on my nerves, I would really love not to have to make that sacrifice – but if I really have to go through with it, then give me strength and grace to follow your will: “Your will be done”.**

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